## Introduction

### Why Study IR Theory?

### How Is This Relevant To Debate?

## Drezner

### Drezner’s Introduction

#### Zombies? Really?

#### What is the purpose of studying zombies?

#### It’s useful to study these theories even if it’s imperfect.

#### Defining zombies.

#### There are different theories of zombie origins and capabilities, but this doesn’t really matter for our purposes.

### Realism

#### Realism defined.

#### Realism says… zombies wouldn’t change IR.

#### Realism says… zombies won’t change power relations.

#### Realism says… the balance of power might change a little, but not really.

#### Realism says… there might be balancing coalitions, but they’d mostly fail.

#### Realism says… states would use the zombie problem to expand their power.

#### Realism says… human-zombie alliances would be formed for strategic reasons.

#### Realism says… zombie governments would be the same as human governments.

### Liberalism

#### Liberalism defined.

#### Liberalism… seems like it might make the zombie problem worse.

#### Liberalism… seems to be unable to explain how cooperation with zombies would be possible.

#### Liberalism says… zombies would cooperate with one another.

#### Liberalism says… international coordination would occur, including the creation of a World Zombie Organization. This might work.

#### Liberalism says… it would be hard to solve the zombie problem because it’s a prohibition regime.

#### Liberalism says… non-democratic regimes would make combatting zombies difficult.

#### Liberalism says… NGOs would make it difficult to implement anti-zombie policies.

#### Liberalism says… these problems could be overcome to achieve an imperfect but successful solution.

### Neoconservatism

#### Neoconservatism defined.

#### Neoconservatism says… zombies are an existential threat and we must exterminate them.

#### Neoconservatism says… only massive military force can defeat the zombies.

#### Neoconservatism says… the zombies are part of a wider Axis of Evil Dead that includes all other enemies.

#### Neoconservatism says… keep trying shock and awe and keep escalating the violence until it works. But it wouldn’t work against zombies.

### Constructivism

#### Constructivism defined.

#### Constructivism says… zombies are what humans make of them. This could mean panic and anarchy or (more likely) cooperation.

#### Constructivism says… existing zombie films should be destroyed because they reify “apocalypse myths.”

#### Constructivism says… humans should attempt to socialize zombies into human culture.

#### Constructivism says… zombies might socialize humans into zombie culture.

### Feminism

#### Feminism defined.

#### Liberal feminism says… emancipation of women helps combat zombies.

#### Liberal feminism says… there will be a debate over whether women can “have it all.”

#### Critical feminism says… zombies would exacerbate oppression of women.

#### Poststructural feminism says… zombies can help us better understand and confront intersectional hierarchies.

### Domestic Politics

#### Do domestic politics matter? Compare the U.S. and China.

#### In the United States… the executive would initially set zombie policy.

#### In the United States… over time, public opinion would increasingly shape zombie policy.

#### In the United States… zombies and their families will make zombie policy more difficult.

#### In the United States… corporations (and especially defense contractors) would heavily influence zombie policy.

#### In China… the interest group problem is totally different.

#### In China… the initial zombie policy would be more extreme, but over time they may decide to protect the elites and sacrifice the public.

#### U.S. and Chinese policies will initially be similar, but over time they will diverge. This may prevent global cooperation.

### Drezner’s Conclusion

#### There is a lot of agreement across different IR theories.

#### Extinction is unlikely — each theory thinks it can create effective solutions.

#### But the consequences will still be disastrous.

#### All IR theories need to move away from total focus on the state.

#### How do we decide what theory is best? Maybe we don’t have to or can’t — but IR theory is still useful.

## Beyond Drezner

### Are IR “Isms” Obsolete?

#### Fights over the “best epistemology” are pointless.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

As I began, our task as scholars is to understand better the world in which we live. Our privileged position as scholars in society rests upon this goal, or at least its pursuit. We do not produce understanding by fighting theological wars between ourselves at either the theoretical or epistemological levels. Rather, we achieve understanding by asking questions about important phenomena that we do not now understand well, employing appropriate theories to answer these questions, and then being honest with ourselves and others about the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence we have been able to bring to bear.

Today, no single theoretical or epistemological approach deserves hegemony. Diversity of theory and method is necessary, at least at this stage of our intellectual development. Intellectual monocultures are rightfully feared. But the current cacophony is not what we should aspire to. Rather than useful debate we have turned inward to self-contained research traditions and epistemologies and, in turn, we focus on first principles. Intellectual progress does not come from proclaiming ever more loudly the superiority of one’s approach to audiences who have stopped listening. Let’s end the theological crusades and seek progress in understanding real problems of world politics. Perhaps then we will earn the privileges society has accorded us.

#### We should embrace multiple theories and epistemologies.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

Our duty as scholars is to enhance understanding of the world and, if possible, to identify levers that when manipulated can facilitate progress toward more humane and normatively desirable ends. Society privileges us as academics with a relatively prosperous and certainly desirable lifestyle so that we can add to the stock of human knowledge and, hopefully, provide some insight into how to improve social life. Most important, society—or at least, Western society—entrusts us with the power to organize our professional lives and our academic inquiries in any way that we, as scholars, think appropriate. We are a genuinely self-regulating profession both in what constitutes knowledge and in how we define and create incentives for professional success. In this essay, I probe some tensions between our professional practices in the field of international studies and the quality of our professional output. We are not giving society what it deserves, not only in terms of policy-relevant research where the “the gap” is of long-standing (George 1993). We are not giving society what it deserves even in terms of basic theoretical and empirical knowledge about world politics, a domain that we as scholars claim as our own.

My critique of our profession is a common one, but one worth repeating. Most generally, we organize ourselves into academic “sects” that engage in self-affirming research and then wage theological debates between academic religions. This occurs at both the level of theory and epistemology. In turn, we reward those who stake out extreme positions within each sect. Unfortunately, this academic sectarianism, a product of our own internal political struggles, produces less understanding rather than more. Some reasonably fear intellectual “monocultures,” as McNamara (2009) has called the possible hegemony of rationalism. But the current cacophony is not a sign of productive intellectual ferment in the pursuit of meaningful knowledge.2 Rather, we have produced a clash of competing theologies each claiming its own explanatory “miracles” and asserting its universal truth and virtue.

Instead, a large measure of intellectual humility is in order. Theoretically, we are far from the holy grail of a universal theory of international politics—if indeed such a grail even exists. We should focus instead on developing contingent, mid-level theories of specific phenomena. This analytical eclecticism is likely to be more productive (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). But we also need a lexicon for translating otherwise incommensurable theories and making them mutually intelligible. In the following section, I outline the problems with theoretical sects and affirm the case for analytic eclecticism. I then end with one possible “Rosetta stone” that aims to facilitate conversation across research traditions by suggesting that all theories of international studies can be disaggregated into the basic and common concepts of interests, interactions, and institutions.

Epistemologically, there is perhaps an even deeper divide that is, unfortunately, not so easily bridged. The nomothetic vs narrative divide cuts through all of the social sciences and possibly beyond. This divide endures because scholars—either innately or through socialization—find one form of explanation more intellectually satisfying than the other. Yet, in international studies, we have reified this divide and, as with our theories, have formed mutually exclusive churches. Rather than claiming one or the other epistemology is always and everywhere superior, we should recognize that both are valid and perhaps even complementary paths to understanding. The question is not which approach is inherently superior, but which yields greater insights under what circumstances. The second major section below takes up epistemology and its consequences for professional practice and knowledge.

#### No “ism” theory can fully explain world politics.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

International studies has long been divided into several so-called paradigms or what Sil and Katzenstein (2010), following Laudan (1996), more appropriately call “research traditions.”3 These research traditions include realism, liberalism, Marxism, neorealism, neoliberal institutionalism, constructivism, postmodernism, and feminism (see Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008). Recently, this list has grown to include a variety of non-ism “isms” including the English school, International Political Sociology, Open Economy Politics, and others.

Each research tradition has a unique set of core assumptions about the nature of world politics. These assumptions, in turn, are often incommensurate across traditions. They specify different units of analysis (individuals, groups, and states), varying interests of actors (wealth, power, and status), even different decision-making processes (logic of consequences vs logic of appropriateness). Perhaps most important, they embody different visions of world politics as inherently conflictual, more cooperative, or the “open” product of the actors’ own actions. As in all research traditions, these assumptions define the boundaries of inquiry, what is “known” and unknown, and even what questions and puzzles are worth asking.4 Although I think the association is more tenuous or at least lacks a one-to-one correspondence (see Epistemology: The Enduring Divide), sets of assumptions may also imply certain epistemologies and methods.

This diverse range of research traditions reflects the complex state of world politics and the tentative state of our knowledge. International studies deals with the largest and most complicated social system possible (barring extraterrestrials, see Wendt and Duvall 2008; or perhaps zombies, see Drezner 2011). We do not have—and are not likely to have for the foreseeable future—a general, universal, and empirically powerful theory of international studies. We are far from a grand unified field theory of international studies, if such a thing is even possible. Rather, we will almost certainly continue to have many different partial theories that, at best, provide insight into limited pieces of the overall puzzle of world politics. As scholars, we should accept these limits with humility and grace and, indeed, embrace partiality.

#### First problem with separating into “isms:” it reifies research traditions.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

First, we reify research traditions. We are all familiar with the mandatory literature review in articles and books wherein complex literatures are grouped into one or more schools for the primary purpose of demonstrating what is new and unique about the author’s own contribution. These are necessary for positioning our work in the field. We likewise organize courses—and especially introductory courses and graduate field seminars—in terms of the “great debates” or “great books” where we assign exemplary works that help students identify the core traits of each tradition. We also organize our handbooks of international studies by research tradition (see Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008). This is how we introduce novices into the shared understanding of the field and its practices. In classifying research into such categories, we collectively construct the research traditions in which we live. But in classifying research in these ways, we also necessarily lose subtlety, emphasize lowest common denominators, and simplify scholarly inquiry into easily recognizable schools. In short, through often well-intentioned practice, we force research into artificial traditions that we mistakenly believe have real standing and meaning.

#### Second problem with separating into “isms:” it rewards extremism.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

Second, having reified research traditions, we then reward extremism. We all cite the same canonical sources in our own and other research traditions.8 We assign these same works in our courses. These canonical works are typically read to embody the assumptions of a research tradition in pure form. Their purpose is to communicate meaning and information to other scholars—citing “Waltz 1979,”“Keohane 1984,” or “Wendt 1999,” for instance, carries a world of meaning to sophisticates who have learned the research traditions. These canonical works serve a useful purpose by orienting debates within the field.

Although they are typically bold, clear statements of a new approach, like the research traditions they come to embody these iconic works are themselves reified, with meanings attributed to them that the author may not have intended. In interpretation, they lose subtlety, sophistication, and—most important—qualification. Wendt, for instance, has written that, properly understood, many of the issues between rationalism and constructivism dissolve (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 67). Keohane (1984, esp. 9 and 245), in his own writings, has always positioned himself between traditions as beginning from realist foundations and then developing the role of institutions on that footing. Nonetheless, these canonical works are commonly interpreted by the international studies community as staking out intellectual positions that are notable precisely for their “purity” or, more accurately, their extremism.

#### Third problem with separating into “isms:” research traditions can’t be tested.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

Third, we mistake research traditions for actual theories. As noted, traditions are defined by shared sets of core assumptions. In principle, these core assumptions may be sufficient to generate deductively valid hypotheses or other forms of explanation. In practice, however, these shared assumptions are more often incomplete and must be supplemented by additional assumptions to yield specific hypotheses and explanations. That is, the core assumptions orient scholars working within a research tradition, but they are seldom complete enough to explain specific outcomes of interest. Waltz (1979:118, 121), for instance, was emphatic that two and only two assumptions—anarchy and the desire to survive—were sufficient to predict that states will tend to balance against stronger powers. But these assumptions are, in fact, consistent with a much larger range of behaviors, including cooperation and collective security organizations, on the one hand, and bandwagoning, on the other. In other words, these same assumptions are consistent with both balancing and not balancing, and thus, the research tradition is theoretically indeterminate (Lake and Powell 1999:23–24). To deduce the proposition that states tend to balance, additional assumptions must be added to the core assumptions of neorealism. Similarly, Powell (1991) and Snidal (1991a,b) showed that both neorealism and neoliberalism did not generate unique predictions about relative and absolute gains maximization, as commonly thought (Grieco 1993), but were actually indeterminate as well; with additional assumptions, each tradition could generate predictions of relative and absolute gains behavior as a special case. That most research traditions are insufficient to generate hypotheses about actual interstate behavior is further suggested by the proliferation of theories within each that all claim allegiance to the same core assumptions. Thus, we have offensive realism, defensive realism, neoclassical realism, and more, all sharing a common set of assumptions understood as realist but differing in the auxiliary assumptions they employ.9 This explains how numerous theories can co-exist and be unified within a single research tradition.10

In turn, since their assumptions are typically incomplete, research traditions cannot be assessed directly. As they are often underspecified and do not generate deductively valid hypotheses themselves, they cannot be “tested” on their own terms. Sometimes, since with different auxiliary assumptions they may predict both a behavior and its opposite, they cannot be tested at all. One can probe the explanatory power of a theory, but usually not of a tradition. Nonetheless, scholars often pit traditions against one another in head-to-head competitions.11 In these battles, since each tradition is incomplete and yields few logically deductive predictions, no empirical evidence can shed any meaningful light on the explanatory power of the approach or, inversely, broad ranges of behavior may be equally consistent with its assumptions. Without determinate predictions, scholars play a game of “heads I win, tails you lose” in which their preferred approach is almost always supported.

#### Fourth problem with separating into “isms:” theorists from different traditions focus only on “their” issues — no falsifiable scholarship.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

Fourth, we narrow the permitted subject matter of our studies to those topics, periods, and observations that tend to confirm the particular strengths of our tradition. Realists, for instance, tend to focus mainly on security policies of great powers where their assumptions appear to fit slightly better, and then find evidence for the power of realism. Liberals tend to focus on economic policy where their assumptions appear to fit slightly better, and then find evidence for the power of liberalism. Neoliberal institutionalists study institutions, which not coincidentally tends to affirm the important role of institutions. Constructivists study changes in norms, and find their approach persuasive. English school scholars often focus on the socialization of polities within the international system, and find evidence of the power of their approach and so on. This narrowing of empirical focus need not be a conscious strategy but can be a natural by-product of the search for confirming evidence. Having spent years developing a theory, it is not unreasonable to apply it where it is most likely to fit—at least as a first, initial test of plausibility. Journals and book publishers are also notoriously loath to publish null findings, a belief that need not be true to have a major effect on the choice of research topics by scholars of different traditions.

By narrowing its empirical focus, however, each tradition affirms itself by studying that which it does best and ignoring subjects that do not conform to expectations. This produces self-affirming sects that come to believe in the power of their tradition based on a selective reading of the possible empirical evidence. It is here that research traditions move from the realm of objective social science to theology. Having adopted a tradition, we then look only for evidence that affirms our prior belief in the rightness of that tradition. Practice becomes not an attempt to falsify theories through ever more demanding tests, but to support theories that were adopted prior to their confrontation with evidence. In essence, we eschew social science theories that can, in principle, be falsified for beliefs that are largely impervious to evidence.

#### Fifth problem with separating into “isms:” it creates a harmful intellectual arms race.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

Fifth, scholars within each research tradition aspire for their approach to be the scientific paradigm. Rather than accept that our favored tradition is inevitably partial and limited in scope and domain, we seek intellectual hegemony. We claim that our particular tradition with its unique set of assumptions is a general approach that can and should be treated as a universal or near universal paradigm. I have always found the phrases “I am realist” or “As a neoliberal institutionalist, I think…” to be peculiar statements. The only logical construction is that the speaker is asserting that his or her particular tradition is superior to all other known traditions, a claim that all questions can be answered by theories based on the assumptions of that tradition. Thus, by the third and fourth pathologies, we validate our often incomplete theories through favorable and selective evidence but, by the fifth, we then assert they are universal and superior to—or at least worthy of respect by adherents of—other equally self-validated traditions.

There are, perhaps, strong reasons of self-identification to seek intellectual hegemony. As scholars, much of our self-worth is entwined with our ideas. To vanquish the alternatives, if even in our own minds, validates our contributions and ourselves. There are also strong professional incentives to win the contest for intellectual hegemony. To establish one’s tradition as the tradition promises to put the original adherents at the top of the field. Even if individual scholars are not so narrowly instrumental, intellectual combat is like an arms race. Each tradition perceives the failure to compete for hegemony as ceding ground to opponents, and thus, each tradition believes it must compete in expectation that others will compete for dominance. To admit the partial nature of one’s theory is to risk being subsumed as a special case within someone else’s tradition—a lower status. Thus, everyone aspires to hegemony if only to prevent others from conquering the field. But like arms races, this intellectual competition leaves everyone worse off than if they could simply cooperate, which in this case means admitting the partial nature and limited empirical evidence for every theory now known in the field.

#### Debates about “assumptions” are impossible to resolve and a distraction from pressing policy issues.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

These five pathologies combine to divert professional debate from the substance of world politics to first principles. Having created academic sects based on incommensurate assumptions and supported by selective evidence, we do not seek to assess which approach helps us understand world politics best (or helps us understand which range of phenomena best). We focus instead on the inherent superiority of this or that set of assumptions. Rather than seeking to understand the world—our highest obligation as scholars—we debate assumptions seemingly without end. What are the fundamental units of world politics? Are individuals, groups or social collectivities, or organizations “rational”? Do actors seek power, welfare, justice, or something else? Which matters more, system or unit, structure or agency? Without comparable propositions derived from these competing research traditions and assessed against the same patterns of behavior, there is no possible answer to such existential questions. This makes for a continuing and lively debate of course, but it adds little to our understanding of world politics and nothing at all to practical policymakers. Rather than seeking to understand the complex and often frightening world around us, we spend far too much of our intellectual time and energy debating assumptions as if they mattered in absolute terms. It is here that research traditions tip over from being useful organizing devices to theologies. Assumptions stop being treated as more or less useful simplifications of a complex reality and become beliefs that are accepted or not as truths. We have left the realm of scholarly inquiry and entered the world of academic religions. By whatever definition, we have stopped doing “science.”

#### We should study problems, not theories.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

An Alternative

Rather than forming sects and debating theology, imagine the contributions that we as scholars could make if we devoted our professional and intellectual energies to studying things that matter. Imagine reorganizing our research and professional associations around problems, not approaches. Imagine as well a graduate field seminar not organized around research traditions but topics like Global Climate Change, Growth and Development, Economic and Political Inequality, and Genocide and Political Violence. The seminar discussion could then focus on “what do we know” rather than “what are the central tenets of this particular sect”?

#### We should embrace partial theories that support practical policy solutions.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

In addition, we should embrace partiality. That is, we should acknowledge that all current theories are partial and state explicitly their boundary and scope conditions. Modesty in acknowledging such limitations is actually in the self-interest of scholars. A common but too easy criticism to make of another’s work is “yes, you may explain that” but “you can’t explain this,” where “this” happens to be the critic’s area of specialized knowledge that, in turn, supports her favored research tradition. With properly stated boundary and scope conditions, we would know whether the theory was intended to apply to “this” and whether the critic makes a valid observation. Through changes in editorial policy, authors should be required to include a short paragraph on the boundary conditions of their analysis and to state explicitly what their theory cannot explain. Even if editors do not require it, we as individual reviewers can insist on it. More important, the end—deeper knowledge—will hopefully justify the embrace of partiality. We are all touching different parts of the proverbial elephant, even while claiming to be holding it in its entirety. By pooling our knowledge of the different parts, we might then be able to describe the whole animal more effectively. We might also then have something constructive to say to policymakers who want to control the elephant.

This is not, I want to make clear, a plea for atheoretic or necessarily policy-relevant research, although the latter certainly has its place. We need theories to explain real-world patterns, not merely to describe them. And we need basic theory to reveal causes even when they are not amenable to manipulation by policymakers. But we should, as Sil and Katzenstein (2010) argue, embrace analytic eclecticism. A single scholar ought to be able to work on questions of war with theories of rational unitary states, questions of global environmental change with theories of individual norms, and questions of trade policy with theories of sectors pursuing their material interests without fear of being criticized for inconsistency.

#### Reject “epistemology first” — contingency best.

Lake 11 — David A. Lake, Jerri-Ann and Gary E. Jacobs Professor of Social Sciences, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and former Research Director for International Relations at the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation at the University of California-San Diego, President of the International Studies Association, holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and Political Economy from Cornell University, 2011 (“Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

The question of epistemology in international studies suffers from the same pathologies for theories outlined earlier, and which I need not repeat here. We reify each approach, reward extremism, fail to specify research designs completely, apply epistemologies selectively where they are most likely to work, and then claim universality. Through these pathologies, we not only create academic religions of different theories but also become committed to academic sects with different epistemologies.

Like our theories, these epistemologies have become increasingly politicized and used as criteria and even weapons in power struggles within the discipline. Gatekeepers increasingly use one’s adherence to this or that epistemological religion to determine who gets hired where, who gets access to resources, and who is accepted in various professional networks. We increasingly talk and interact only with others of our same epistemological persuasion.

Yet, although it may disappoint partisans, I can think of no objective reason to prefer one epistemology over another. Rather, the choice of epistemology by scholars appears to be largely subjective. We appear to be drawn to one or the other approach by intuition: one form of explanation simply feels right. Some are satisfied only when an event is placed in its full historical perspective with all the conjunctures and counterfactuals accounted for. Others are satisfied only when events accord with an appropriately derived hypothesis that has passed many demanding experimental tests. For myself, I read a lot in history—far more than I read in political science—and benefit from and enjoy these mostly narrative accounts immensely. But at the same time, I am usually not persuaded by causal claims that lack well-specified theories and experimental tests. In turn, while most of my own research has focused on the history of US foreign policy, the cases are treated within a nomological approach (see Lake 1988, 1999). One can move across the divide without finding the causal claims on the other side especially satisfying.

I do not know whether these epistemological tastes are innate, genetically hard-wired, or learned, the product of early socialization. Just as beauty is found for some in pure math and others in poetry, I suspect that scholars come predisposed to prefer one form of explanation over the other. Although graduate school appears to shape one’s views, suggesting socialization, there is also a lot of self-selection into graduate programs.18 Similarly, academic departments are typically populated by scholars of diverse theoretical perspectives but tend to be more homogenous by epistemology, also suggesting socialization. Yet, again, scholars typically want to be surrounded by colleagues whose work they respect and admire, and what they find persuasive, in turn, is partly a function of epistemology. Thus, innate tastes can lead to intellectual clustering within departments and segregation between institutions.19 That there is a transatlantic divide in international studies along epistemological lines is undeniable, and is probably the strongest evidence for socialization (Cohen 2007). Even here, however, professional gatekeepers within different intellectual communities—who themselves know intuitively that their preferred form of explanation is superior—may also shape the development of the discipline within their respective regions. The upshot is that we do not know much about the origins of epistemological preferences. Regardless of origins, however, epistemological differences exist and massively affect how we evaluate research in the field.

The nomothetic and narrative forms of explanation have coexisted for centuries, perhaps even millennia. One may appear to pull ahead at a particular moment, but the other always seems to stage a comeback. Neither is likely to win nor lose decisively. What then is to be done? Faced with alternative forms of explanation, what should scholars do? The usual route, as with theory, is to try to crush adherents of the other faith by seizing and occupying strategic positions within the disciplinary hierarchy. And we do see considerable disciplinary positioning occurring today, at least in international studies. Many think of this as a war in which truth and justice will prevail only if their side wins. I suggest an alternative course that embraces diversity at the level of the discipline, even if individual scholars continue to find one or the other approach more intuitively satisfying. As a community, we ought to do the following.

First, recognize the legitimacy of alternative forms of explanation and respect the approach used by colleagues. It is the supreme act of intellectual hubris to assume that whichever form of explanation intuitively appeals to you is the inherently better form. If the choice of epistemology is even partly subjective, then trying to win converts is a fool’s errand, at best a temporary achievement.

Second, judge each approach on its own terms. We should focus on improving each approach as it understands its own success. Is the narrative sufficient? Are there alternative currents in the historical record that need to be told as well? Are there important events that are inconsistent with the narrative or that are distorted by the analyst to be made consistent with the narrative?20 Alternatively, is the theory logically derived? Do the hypotheses follow from the premises? Are the variables operationalized appropriately? Is the research design sound?

Third, accept that each approach is likely to apply more or less well to different questions. At the moment, and most likely into the future, the narrative protocol can likely apply better to long-term changes in global norms, such as those against slavery and in favor of human rights. Changes in fundamental conceptions of right and wrong, legitimate and illegitimate behavior, are rare and typically do not lend themselves to nomological analysis. The processes unfold over a time scale in which it is difficult to hold features of the social environment constant. Disciplined narratives are likely to produce greater insights into these phenomena. Conversely, when social interactions are repeated frequently or within well-structured and stable institutions, nomological analysis may offer parsimonious and powerful explanations. We know a lot about the causes of wars and civil wars, given their frequency and observability. We also know a lot about economic policymaking within democratic institutions where the rules of the “political game” are well specified. Each approach has much to teach us. The question is not which epistemology is inherently superior, but when and where each approach offers greater insights and understanding.

#### Don’t discard research traditions — they’re useful to study even if they’re not absolute.

Sil and Katzenstein 11 — Rudra Sil, Associate Professor of Political Science and School of Arts and Sciences Faculty Director of the Huntsman Program in International Studies and Business at the University of Pennsylvania, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California-Berkeley, and Peter J. Katzenstein, Walter S. Carpenter Jr. Professor of International Studies at Cornell University, former President of the American Political Science Association, holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University, 2011 (“De-Centering, Not Discarding, the ‘Isms’: Some Friendly Amendments,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

Finally, we argue here for a more nuanced treatment of paradigms or research traditions. While we join Lake in trying to de-center them, we have no wish to discard them altogether. Over the decades, in many ways paradigms have served us well. They have helped us to focus on and understand better the operation of certain variables, mechanisms, and processes. Disagreement between research traditions has prodded scholars to reformulate their problems and refine their theories. And, for certain kinds of problems, the scope conditions and metatheoretical assumptions associated with a given research tradition do make sense. Ironically, inter-paradigm debates help eclectic scholars avert the specter of the “tower of Babel.” Analytic eclecticism neither suggests that “anything goes,” nor seeks to create endless laundry lists of potentially relevant factors. It asks us to understand and appreciate the theories and narratives developed in different traditions of research, placing a wager that they contain important insights that deserve serious consideration. As Craig Parsons (2007:43) notes, “There is no solid middle ground without poles, no useful eclecticism without distinct things to mix.” Analytic eclecticism is an effort to construct a problem-specific complex analytic framework that is capable of revealing the interconnections among discrete sets of mechanisms and processes normally explored in isolation. But, such eclecticism requires engaging, not discarding, the research products associated with existing paradigms1.

#### Debates between competing IR theories are important and valuable — Lake is wrong.

Nau 11 — Henry R. Nau, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs and Co-Director of the U.S-Japan-South Korea Legislative Exchange Program at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University, served as Senior Staff Member responsible for international economic affairs on President Reagan's National Security Council and as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs in the Department of State, holds a Ph.D. from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, 2011 (“No Alternative To ‘Isms’,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

Given the nature of social knowledge, I am not persuaded that our profession suffers excessively from Lake’s five pathologies. Because the “subjects” we study are laden with values, and we as scholars are “subjects” ourselves, we take sides in our studies. This taking sides is subtle; it is not partisan or deliberate. In fact, it is quintessentially human. When we select topics, we inevitably ignore others. What is “worth knowing,” Max Weber ([1917] 2004:18) reminds us, “can never be proved by scientific methods. It can only be interpreted with reference to its ultimate meaning.” We study things that have different ultimate meanings for us.

Lake acknowledges this fact: “much of our self-worth is entwined with our ideas.” Realism privileges the study of force because realist scholars are convinced that violent conflict is ineradicable, and the more we know about it, the better. Liberalism prioritizes the study of diplomacy and disarmament because liberal scholars believe that, under almost all circumstances, violent conflict is unnecessary. We inevitably like certain “subjects,” such as labor unions, more than others, such as Wall Street financiers. Indeed, we belong to the “subject” groups we study, such as political parties and activist organizations. And it bears remembering that our profession is not representative of American politics. Almost all our colleagues belong to the Democratic Party and support liberal causes. The conservative half of America distrusts the academy, and the academy distrusts large portions of the American public, such as the Tea Party movement.

To the extent humanly possible, we as scholars separate our likes and dislikes from our research. But, honestly, we are not superhuman, and we can never give all problems equal attention or all evidence equal or even adequate coverage. Hence, we are unlikely to agree objectively either on a definitive list of theories or on a definitive list of concepts (Rosetta stone) around which “all theories of international studies can be disaggregated.” Social science research is innately open-ended and falsifiable. “None of our sacred cows is immune to criticism,” as Bob Keohane (2009a) reminds us, and new “isms” may be developing just around the corner.

Under these circumstances, “theological” scholarly debate is not only ineradicable, it is functional. Sectarian debates expose the full human character of the research enterprise; we pursue our research with passion, not dispassion. And that passion is necessary if knowledge is truly open-ended. Revolutionary science requires doggedness to challenge and upend normal science because consensus can be just as deadening as sectarianism. I have been through enough “ism” debates in our field over the years to believe that they have value. When I trained in the 1960s, classical realism reigned. Idealism was dead. With the good intention of accumulating knowledge, neorealism streamlined classical realism seeking greater parsimony. Thankfully, at that point, the profession did not settle for consensus. While European integration studies kept alive the flicker of idealism (its concern with political loyalties/identities), interdependence and neoliberal institutional studies challenged neorealism (Keohane 1986; Baldwin 1993). The “neo” debate not only invigorated research and teaching; it was progressive. Eventually, it showed that realism and liberalism shared more than we thought. Both took actor identities for granted. The stage was set for the constructivist turn and a revival of “idealist” or ideational studies of international relations (Katzenstein 1996; Wendt 1999). Who would argue that this latest era of sectarian competition has not been both invigorating and productive?

#### Without studying “big” IR theories, we can’t understand underlying disagreements.

Nau 11 — Henry R. Nau, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs and Co-Director of the U.S-Japan-South Korea Legislative Exchange Program at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University, served as Senior Staff Member responsible for international economic affairs on President Reagan's National Security Council and as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs in the Department of State, holds a Ph.D. from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, 2011 (“No Alternative To ‘Isms’,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

However, going beyond this to seek a profession or world without theoretical or ideological walls is hopelessly utopian. Problems do not exist without underlying theories to explain why they are problems in the first place. Take Lake’s lexicon of problems. It is essentially a taxonomy derived from rational choice theory.2 Relatively speaking, it privileges agency over structure, interests over identities, interactions over sovereignty, and institutions (hierarchy) over anarchy. OK, you say, add these concepts to the list as well. But, now, what have we gained? We have a long list of problems which various theories treat differently. That’s where we are now. Moreover, mid-level theories, which Lake calls for, inevitably leave out “big questions” posed from different or higher levels of analysis, such as the effect of the global structure of power on unit interests and interactions (Keohane 2009b). Thus, mid-level theories focusing on specific problems may not get rid of “isms”; they may just hide them and make it harder to challenge prevailing ones.

Take Lake’s comment that scholars “identify levers that when manipulated can facilitate progress toward more humane and normatively desirable ends.” This formulation completely ignores critical theory studies. Some Western and most non-Western scholars would argue that levers sifted from the past by rationalist, Western thought are soaked with Western imperialism and therefore not applicable or desirable as guides to manipulate the future. They would debate what “more humane” and “normatively desirable ends” might mean. Once we go beyond the most vaporous formulations of common goals such as common humanity, we disagree on almost everything else.3

#### Explicitly studying IR theories by comparing and contrasting assumptions is the best way to further knowledge about world politics.

Nau 11 — Henry R. Nau, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs and Co-Director of the U.S-Japan-South Korea Legislative Exchange Program at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University, served as Senior Staff Member responsible for international economic affairs on President Reagan's National Security Council and as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs in the Department of State, holds a Ph.D. from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, 2011 (“No Alternative To ‘Isms’,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

An alternative to Lake’s approach, as suggested above, is to compel multiple full-scale theories or “isms” of international relations to confront one another more directly and have the author(s) and critic(s) of articles formulate jointly how they differ. These differences often derive less from boundary conditions, which exclude certain independent variables and levels of analysis, than from judgments scholars make about how the causal arrows run among the variables they include. “Isms” usually include all independent variables (power, interactions/institutions, ideas, and deep-seated historical forces) and levels of analysis (individual, domestic, foreign policy, and systemic) but differ in terms of which independent variable and level of analysis exert the primary causal influence in world affairs (Nau 2011). Realism, for example, does not ignore ideas; it just concludes that power is the primary source of ideas—big powers think one way, small powers another. Liberalism dos not devalue force; it just sees diplomacy as the primary means to constrain the use of force. And constructivism does not diminish practices/institutions or material power; it just sees identities and discourse interpreting and giving meaning to these variables.

We all agree that there is an “elephant” out there, namely some objective reality that adjudicates (falsifies) our propositions; but, be careful, it may be a “tree” not an elephant. Calling it an elephant suggests we already know what the whole is and therefore, as Lake argues, can pool the parts to assemble the whole. Realism has the trunk; constructivism has the tail. But we do not know whether the whole has a tail or a leaf, any more than Newtonian or quantum mechanics knows whether nature is fixed or probabilistic. We are searching for the elephant or the tree. So we have only parts of different, possibly not complementary, wholes. And, if we deliberately reject holistic theories because they are hegemonic, we may never know what a possible whole looks like. The profession descends into a cacophony of partial and incompatible theories. No one understands anyone because whatever whole we have is little more than an open-ended taxonomy that means different things to different sects. That’s the real tower of Babel.

#### IR theory has made important contributions to improving the world.

Nau 11 — Henry R. Nau, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs and Co-Director of the U.S-Japan-South Korea Legislative Exchange Program at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University, served as Senior Staff Member responsible for international economic affairs on President Reagan's National Security Council and as Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs in the Department of State, holds a Ph.D. from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, 2011 (“No Alternative To ‘Isms’,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 2, June, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Wiley Online Library)

I am less persuaded than Lake that “we are not giving society what it deserves even in terms of basic theoretical and empirical knowledge about world politics.” In my lifetime, international relations theory has contributed some significant policy ideas to public life and human improvement. Policies of freer trade and globalization advanced the lives of millions of people since the 1930s, in recent decades with greater equality as developing economies grew faster than advanced ones. And policies of democratic enlargement and economic engagement, drawn from democratic peace studies, made Eastern Europe and much of the rest of the world noticeably better off after the Cold War than they were before. Admittedly, globalization and democracy promotion remain contested. Iraq and the financial meltdown generated blowback, especially from non-Western societies. But that’s my point. Good ideas remain good only against continuous and open-ended opposition. We need more spirited and wider intellectual and policy debates, not less animated or narrower ones.

### Critique of Drezner #1

#### A critique of Drezner’s Zombie IR.

Hannah and Wilkinson 16 — Erin Hannah, Associate Professor of Political Science at King’s University College at Western University, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and Rorden Wilkinson, Professor and Chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Brooks World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Auckland (New Zealand), 2016 (“Zombies and IR: A Critical Reading,” *Politics*, Volume 36, Issue 1, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Sage Journals Online, p. 6)

Given the current interest in zombies, and the way the subject matter lends itself to IR, it seems only prudent to take an IR of the undead seriously in the classroom. There are, however, reasons to suggest that we should proceed with some caution and reflect on the purposes and consequences of using a zombie threat to animate our students. Our purpose in this article is to raise two broad questions that we believe are worth reflecting upon if we are to fully realise the utility of an IR of the undead as a pedagogical device. These questions are: first, what are the purposes of using zombieism as a teaching resource; and second, what are the pedagogical consequences of deploying zombie scenarios in the classroom?

Our worry is that zombies are being used merely as a means of teaching students about existing theories of IR rather than as a vehicle for developing critical and normative thinking. If this is the case, not only are we letting slip an engaging way of teaching students about the contours and problems of world politics, we risk underscoring existing divergences in the IR canon that obfuscate our capacity to engage with each other. A second, and related problem, is that by limiting our use of zombies to teaching students how existing approaches would respond to an outbreak of the undead we avoid getting them to push forward thinking about how to solve the most pressing global problems and to come up with alternative ways of organising the world. We see a third danger in the use of an IR of the undead that essentialises country positions, reinforces gender stereotypes and dehumanises people in ways that limit the possibilities for cooperation and legitimises certain forms of violence and attitudes towards adversaries in conflict. Ultimately, we believe that zombieism – particularly if engaged with ‘actively’ (i.e. through role-play, scenario and problem-solving exercises) – is an important tool in our pedagogical armoury. Yet, it is not one that we are utilising fully. Thus, we explain why we believe the answers to the questions we set out above are currently insufficient, present the potential dangers of this insufficiency and offer a way forward that may be more fruitful in making better use of this popular cultural resource.

#### Drezner reifies dominant IR.

Hannah and Wilkinson 16 — Erin Hannah, Associate Professor of Political Science at King’s University College at Western University, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and Rorden Wilkinson, Professor and Chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Brooks World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Auckland (New Zealand), 2016 (“Zombies and IR: A Critical Reading,” *Politics*, Volume 36, Issue 1, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Sage Journals Online, p. 8-9)

The purpose and consequence of Zombie IR

Zombies lend themselves well to the study of IR because they represent massive catastrophes spread through contagious infections that draw students into thinking about the most pressing global, social, political, cultural and economic issues of our time in ways that do not require too great a stretch of the imagination: the spread of disease, mass migration, restricted access to clean drinking water, poverty, food insecurity, environmental degradation, social dislocation and violence in all its manifestations. Like other plagues, zombie threats transcend borders and challenge conventional constructions of social, spiritual, territorial and national boundaries in much the same way as many contemporary threats (Coker, 2013; Saunders, 2012). Thus far, however, zombies have been deployed in IR to teach the canon – the key concepts, paradigms and dilemmas that make up the discipline – through the application of core theoretical approaches to a zombie (post)-apocalypse. Seldom have they been used as a vehicle to critically engage with, or move beyond, that canon.

Drezner (2011b) opened the door for the integration of zombies into IR classrooms with his Theories of International Politics and Zombies. Marketed as an introductory text and recommended alongside existing course readings (see Nexon, 2011), this witty and popular book introduces undergraduate students to the dominant and conventional paradigms in IR by reflecting on the responses of national governments, international organisations and nonstate actors to the zombie apocalypse from the point of view of different theoretical perspectives. Blanton (2013) has sought to take forward the use of zombies by drawing from Brooks’ World War Z, proposing specific teaching tools that can be adapted to its themes such as discussion guides and role-playing exercises. Coker (2013) draws from WWZ to reflect on what zombies can tell us about contemporary conflict and the global war on terror, and the transnational cross-border security problems they engender. Derek Hall (2011) uses zombies – as depicted in the films 28 Days and Wild Zero – as allegories for national forms of capitalism that have an impact upon the global political economy, to argue that ‘zombie capitalism’ can help us better understand the dynamics of national resilience under conditions of globalisation. While Saunders (2012) argues that zombie outbreaks, understood as metaphors for illicit globalisation, can be examined through poststructural lenses to help students understand the politics of borderlands.

Although each of these applications has a utility, so far they have tended to limit the use of zombies to teaching what existing IR theory might tell us about an outbreak of the undead and/or demonstrating the key features of particular theoretical traditions. Zombies have rarely [end page 8] been used to get students to think critically about the value and limits of these traditions. In our view, while zombies currently constructed show good prospects as pedagogical tools for enhancing the learning experiences of students in IR, we should proceed with caution. Two problems present themselves here. Used as an introduction to IR, Drezner’s book is incomplete (it is, despite its marketing, more disciplinary satire than comprehensive text). Of the traditional canon, it concentrates mainly on realism and liberalism, albeit he acknowledges the shortcomings in conventional approaches to IR and their ‘eroding analytical leverage over the security problems of the twenty-first century’ (Drezner, 2011b, p. 112). Other approaches – notably Marxism and feminism – are dismissed out of hand with an ‘amusing’ aside,5 and the remainder of the book comprises approaches that do not normally make it into IR textbooks. Indeed, Drezner spends considerable space detailing domestic- and individual-level variables that may be at play in the development of responses to the global pandemic of zombieism. While domestic-level variables may matter for Zombie IR, Drezner’s exclusive focus on American domestic politics crowds out other IR approaches and the political realities of most people living elsewhere in the world.

These problems are also evident elsewhere in the burgeoning zombie literature. Blanton (2013, pp. 10–11), for instance, details the way second-level bureaucratic and organisational processes can be adapted to develop strategies, weapons and tactics for killing zombies. Yet, in following Drezner’s lead he fails to consider the significance of domestic-level variables beyond US borders. Privileging the American domestic political experience serves to legitimise American ways of thinking and doing, obfuscating critical reflection on US foreign policy and on world order more generally.

Second, the existing Zombie IR literature deals only with the responses to a zombie apocalypse that those cherry-picked theoretical approaches suggest, rather than what an outbreak of the undead tells us about the limitations of IR theory and what other possibilities might exist not only for a different way of addressing an outbreak of zombieism, but also for alternative ways of thinking about IR and world order. While Drezner did not intend his book to be theoretically iconoclastic, it nonetheless remains the case that the lack of a further probing of IR theory in a book that captures the zeitgeist so well misses an opportunity to get students engaged in the task of pushing forward an intellectual canon that has remained static for too long. A forthcoming second edition promises to address some of these shortcomings.

#### Drezner reifies atomization of IR.

Hannah and Wilkinson 16 — Erin Hannah, Associate Professor of Political Science at King’s University College at Western University, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and Rorden Wilkinson, Professor and Chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Brooks World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Auckland (New Zealand), 2016 (“Zombies and IR: A Critical Reading,” *Politics*, Volume 36, Issue 1, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Sage Journals Online, p. 9-11)

Atomisation

A literature is emerging that argues that IR has become too fragmented a discipline (see, e.g. Smith, 2008; Wæver, 2013) and one that has left behind interdisciplinary or grand theoretical debate. In one version of this argument, in the last 30 years the discipline is portrayed as having experienced a strong profusion of approaches in which, paradigmatically, specific knowledge has been advanced, but the lack of serious debate across approaches has stunted the cumulative advancement in IR’s theoretical canon (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014). A second version of this argument posits that IR is increasingly eschewing grand theoretical debate for simple hypotheses testing in an intellectual turn that has seen formal method triumph over theory building (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013). In a third version, IR’s preoccupation with ‘isms’ has got in the way of understanding ‘things that matter’ (Lake, 2011, p. 471). [end page 9]

IR’s theoretical and methodological fragmentation is reflected not only in what we teach, but also in the way we teach it. Weiss and Wilkinson (2014) argue that one consequence of the divide and profusion they observe in the discipline is that the classroom instruction of IR has moved away from a common canon towards an approach that typically starts from a favoured theoretical and methodological position. Exceptions of course exist, but it is not uncommon for North American universities to eschew teaching poststructural and postcolonial approaches, especially at the undergraduate level, for a focus on broadly realist and constructivist approaches with an emphasis on rationalist and reflectivist methodologies. The converse can also be said of the way IR is taught in British and Australian universities, where critical and poststructural approaches are more likely to be taught to students at all levels while eschewing mainstream theories and formal methods (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014, pp. 21–22). The effect of these practices is to make cross-disciplinary engagement difficult. One consequence is that we fail to address common disciplinary questions and, in so doing, ill-equip ourselves as a field of study for thinking about ways of working together to make the world a better place.

The use of zombies in IR classrooms thus far runs the risk of perpetuating these tendencies. As we note above, Drezner’s introduction of zombies to IR is a welcome move. However, its problem is that it simply illustrates what one approach or another might have to say about an outbreak of the undead. Blanton (2013), Hall (2011) and Saunders (2012) undertake to do the same, albeit from different standpoints. Used in this way, Zombie IR merely shows differences between selected units in a narrowly presented theoretical canon. And it does so precisely because, as we illustrate above (and as Drezner and Blanton, among others, acknowledge), zombieism does not lend itself easily to all approaches.

Our worry is, however, a little more particular than the use of a limited theoretical range in dealing with zombies in the classroom. It is the overwhelming preference for just one approach: realism. Blanton (2013, p. 12), for example, claims the existential nature of the zombie threat makes it most amenable to realist problem solving. Although he encourages students to experiment with different lenses to deal with an outbreak of the undead, by his own admission he struggles to find applicability in WWZ for feminist and constructivist approaches to IR (Blanton (2013, pp. 3, 7–8). As we note above, Marxist and reflectivist approaches such as poststructuralism, postcolonialism and critical feminism are all absent in Drezner’s zombie canon. Moreover, Drezner offers up a rationalist treatment of constructivism that provides little more than the idea that, ‘[z]ombies threaten the powerful human norm of not devouring each other for sustenance or pleasure – and therefore arouse greater security concerns as a result’ (Drezner 2011b, p. 68).

It would be too bold to suggest that a reconstructed Zombie IR has the potential to bridge the atomisation of the discipline to which Weiss and Wilkinson (2014), among others, point. However, it is our view that by imagining the devastation that results from a zombie apocalypse we are presented with an opportunity to engage in a critical and cross-disciplinary conversation with our students about how to build a different – and potentially better – world. Instead of asking how one or another mainstream IR theory might respond to a zombie threat, a more preferable approach might be to devise problem- or question-driven scenarios that encourage students to devise and reflect upon solutions as well as on the value of existing theoretical approaches. For example, scenarios could be constructed in which students are asked to decide how scarce water resources could be distributed or how to deal with disease contagion, and to consider all of the related ethical implications. Rather [end page 10] than making the post-apocalypse world fit predominant theories, such an approach invites students to reflect on how their proposed solutions interact with as well as challenge prevailing wisdom.

#### Drezner essentializes countries and prevents emancipatory thinking.

Hannah and Wilkinson 16 — Erin Hannah, Associate Professor of Political Science at King’s University College at Western University, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and Rorden Wilkinson, Professor and Chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Brooks World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Auckland (New Zealand), 2016 (“Zombies and IR: A Critical Reading,” *Politics*, Volume 36, Issue 1, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Sage Journals Online, p. 11-12)

Essentialisation

Not only does the emphasis on mainstream IR theories and conventional security concerns in the extant zombie literature mean that heterodox approaches have so far been excluded, the way zombieism has been used essentialises certain traditions and country positions. As Blanton (2013, p. 5) puts it:

WWZ [World War Z] is a book of counterfactual history, the ways in which states respond to the zombie threat is very much in line with their existing characteristics. ... China brutally represses news of the outbreak and virtually collapses, Russia practices similar brutality and becomes a religious/nationalist state, Israel becomes a zombie-free garrison state, Japan finds itself overrun with zombies and evacuates its entire population and North Korea goes (literally) underground.

This essentialisation is not, however, confined to the negative presentation of certain countries and traditions. It is also at work in the reverse – that is, in celebrating the personalities and characters of the victors – in key zombie tomes from which scholars draw. Brooks’ (2006) recounting of the Zombie Wars is, for example, ultimately a celebration of the triumph of the United States, its government and its value system. Despite early failures such as the Battle of Yonkers and the hysteria that follows the official acknowledgment of the zombie pandemic, the US is portrayed as the victorious messiah. Sound policy making eventually comes to the fore and secures the West Coast Safe Zone, new and effective technologies to combat zombies are developed, the US economy is restructured for wartime production and, beginning with the Battle of Hope and ending with Road to New York, the US is reclaimed from the zombies. Moreover, other countries’ mimicry of America policies and values is portrayed as the source of their resilience after the Zombie Wars. For instance, Cuba’s emergence as a victor and post-apocalypse financial heavyweight was due, in large part, to the repatriation of Cuban Americans and the adoption of capitalism and democracy.

Yet, while the celebration of a ‘domestic’ triumph over the zombie outbreak is, at one level, understandable – American audiences are Brook’s target market – and certainly does not amount to the jingoism evident in the film version, the regurgitation of stylised and subjective country positions (of either the US or of other states) is not unproblematic. Indeed, essentialising country positions in this way is similar to trying to teach students about the inner workings of the UN and world diplomacy through caricatured activities such as replicating en masse UN committees or simply concentrating on the General Assembly in Model United Nations simulations based on what we imagine it is that countries always – and will continue to – do. Rather, we should be asking students to use their knowledge of what passes for debate in and around the world organisation as a platform for thinking about new, alternative and better ways of organizing relations among whatever collectives we imagine are the primary political units of analysis. Better still, we should be asking our students to disrupt existing conceptions for alternative scenarios, perhaps such as what would happen if a corporation were to join the UN – as Iain Banks (1999) does in his book The Business. So, what Zombie IR should also be teaching us is how to use global threats as the basis for constructing new world orders rather than as a medium that distils theoretical claims or reifies country positions. [end page 11]

The consequences of using Zombie IR in the way we currently do is akin to what Steve Smith (2004) referred to in his 2003 International Studies Association (ISA) presidential address as ‘singing our world into existence’, ensuring that it is complicit in the atomisation of the discipline and the constitution of impossibilities, limits, perceptions and exclusions in international politics. Plugging and playing Zombie IR in post-apocalyptic scenarios solidifies existing ways of thinking and doing. It privileges one set of theoretical and ontological assumptions and narrows the scope for critical reflection on how we can dismantle existing power relations and redress resultant social dislocations and asymmetries. It also eschews an attempt to engage in genuine dialogue between competing approaches (something our students need to be better at than we have proven to be) adding cement to our already atomised activities and reinforcing IR’s fragmentation. And it creates several pedagogical pitfalls we should aim to avoid or overcome in future iterations of Zombie IR – to which we now turn.

#### Drezner reinforces violent otherization, training students to commit genocide.

Hannah and Wilkinson 16 — Erin Hannah, Associate Professor of Political Science at King’s University College at Western University, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and Rorden Wilkinson, Professor and Chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Brooks World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Auckland (New Zealand), 2016 (“Zombies and IR: A Critical Reading,” *Politics*, Volume 36, Issue 1, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Sage Journals Online, p. 12-13)

Othering

Another problem with rote-reading Zombie IR is that it can lead students toward behavioural practices that privilege conflict over cooperation. Zombie IR all-too-often replicates lifeboat earth scenarios (Schmidt, 1978) wherein individual survivalism trumps all other concerns, including ethics and complex dimensions of human security. Thus, because zombies lack sentience, higher order thinking and decision-making abilities, there is no possibility of compromise, negotiation or empathy. As Drezner (2013) gleefully declares: ‘Zombies are the perfect metaphor for these threats. As with pandemics and financial crises, they are not open to negotiation. As with terrorism in all its forms, even a small outbreak has the potential to wreak massive carnage.’ As a result, the only available response to a zombie attack or pandemic is to willfully, blindly and often joyfully kill them.

In an interview with the Washington Post, Brooks describes the zombie threat thus:

The lack of rational thought has always scared me when it came to zombies, the idea that there is no middle ground, no room for negotiation. That has always terrified me. Of course that applies to terrorists, but it can also apply to a hurricane, or flu pandemic, or the potential earthquake. ... Any kind of mindless extremism scares me, and we’re living in some pretty extreme times.6

Presented in this way, zombies are constructed as the constitutive ‘other’ (Neumann, 1996; Said, 1979), devoid of identity and unworthy of compassion or rights as (partially) living beings. This practice implies a hierarchy, making the ‘other’ lower or less important than the self. In conflict and survivalist scenarios, this is sometimes accomplished by invoking negative gender or racial stereotypes and by depicting enemies in popular discourse as animals or less-than-human to justify egregious acts of war such as rape, mass killings, torture, deportation, live experimentation and even genocide. Asking students to role-play the practice of ‘othering’ zombies, degrade adversaries and uncritically enact behaviours that have clear parallels in contemporary foreign policy has implications that are, thus far, largely ignored by proponents of Zombie IR. At best, this practice may serve to legitimise and reinforce hierarchies, particular forms of violence and attitudes towards anonymous adversaries or aliens in international conflicts, making students blindly complicit in the construction and reinforcement of a world order that is underscored by violence, hatred and intolerance. At worst, it may become self-fulfilling prophecy. As we send students out into the world to affect change we should be more reflexive about the tools and identities with which we arm them. [end page 12]

While he does not explicitly acknowledge these risks, Blanton (2013, p. 7) does allow the possibility that zombies’ lack of sentience can be relaxed in scenarios to allow for discussions about the social construction of the undead. He suggests that a scenario akin to Castro’s Dead Like Me, wherein humans emulate the behaviour of zombies to blend in and survive, may provide an entry point for thinking through the politics of identity. Warm Bodies (Marion, 2011) and its themes of love, memory, salvation and metamorphosis may serve a similar function, opening up space to think through zombieism as something that resides in all of us and calling into question what it means to be human. However, no serious unpacking and rethinking of identity and world order can take place as long as we only require students to regurgitate a limited theoretical register alongside narrow understandings of violence, conflict, gender and ethnicity.

#### Drezner reinforces gender violence.

Hannah and Wilkinson 16 — Erin Hannah, Associate Professor of Political Science at King’s University College at Western University, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and Rorden Wilkinson, Professor and Chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Brooks World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Auckland (New Zealand), 2016 (“Zombies and IR: A Critical Reading,” *Politics*, Volume 36, Issue 1, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Sage Journals Online, p. 13-14)

Gender stereotyping

It is also prudent to consider the way Zombie IR, as it has been practiced to date, can reinforce gender stereotypes. With few exceptions, the zombie genre is largely marketed to men and boys under 25. Women are less enthused by zombies in the classroom than their male counterparts. Zombies’ lack of sentience and emotional relationships as well as the gore and unmitigated violence that are central to the zombie genre may have the effect of side-lining or excluding women in pedagogical exercises that rely on popular culture artefacts to which they have difficulty relating. As Blanton (2013, p. 8) suggests, the integration of zombie satire may open up space for thinking through the gendered aspects of human-zombie relationships. The film Fido, which features an emotional relationship between a zombie dog and a human, complex family dynamics, and sex between zombies and humans, is one possible entry point for thinking through gendered identities under conditions of zombieism, but their connection to IR is tenuous at best. Sentience, sex and emotional attachments humanise zombies in several other films such as Dead Alive, Cemetery Man, Day of the Dead and Warm Bodies. Yet, while these films may shine light on themes that are conventionally understood to be appealing to women, they do little to assist in the dismantling of gendered stereotypes or patriarchal structures in IR. Indeed, such stereotypes and structures are widely considered to be part of the recipe for success in the genre.

Most popular cultural manifestations of zombieism feature male protagonists in leading, heroic roles while depicting female characters as marginalised, helpless, servile victims. Epitomised by Barbara in Romero’s Night of the Living Dead series, the quintessential woman in the zombie-verse is highly sexualised, fetishised and exploited. Strong, empowered female characters do make appearances, such as Selena in 28 Days Later and Wichita in Zombieland, but they are each reduced to damsels in distress, dependent on their male counterparts for survival by the end of the films. A rare exception is Resident Evil’s protagonist, Alice, who destabilises gender representations by displaying a combination of violent, confident and highly sexualised agency.

As Blanton (2013, p. 8) points out, gender stereotypes prevail in World War Z where fertile Russian women are coercively impregnated as part of a breeding programme designed to repopulate the country. Unlike the Handmaid’s Tale (Atwood, 1985) – a dystopian novel that also explores the theme of female subjugation through forced breeding – WWZ and the application of mainstream IR theory to the events in the book offer no insight into the various means through which they exercise agency or resistance. The depiction of a female air force pilot who finds herself in peril when she crashes her plane into zombie-infested territory is [end page 13] more complex. While she is tough and competent enough to survive on her own for several days, her sanity is called into question by the female voices in her head, her imaginary radio and the unidentified stranger who provides guidance. Male helicopter pilots ultimately rescue her. Indeed, it seems that truly capable female characters in zombie films are most likely to be found in satires like Shaun of the Dead. In short, the zombie genre celebrates ‘masculine’ behaviours – aggression, control, action – and tends to deny women’s agency and reinforces stereotypes of subordination, sexualisation and objectification. Thus far, these are themes and practices left unexplored by Zombie IR.

To date, Zombie IR is also ontologically blind to the practice of gender-based violence in the genre and to the security issues encountered by women and children more generally in their everyday lives. Shepherd (2013) makes a robust and compelling case for the need to critically examine popular representations of gender and violence. She claims we should ‘read popular culture with a view to exploring what such artefacts can tell us about how we (are expected to) make sense of gender’ (Shepherd, 2013, p. 5). Popular culture often constructs gendered bodies and their violent reproduction and representations of sexuality in ways that have constitutive impacts on global politics. Part of our role as teachers should be to provide students with the tools and the initiative to unpack these representations and to think about the impact they have on world order. Plugging mainstream IR into scripted zombie scenarios does not allow for this. Rather, it works to further entrench the marginalisation of gender in the study of IR and reinforce the intellectual silos that have come to define its character. Moreover, by ignoring gender-based violence, we are unable to think seriously about how to improve the lives and conditions of a great proportion of the world’s people or push the boundaries of possible actions and accepted modes of being.

#### Drezner ignores real world problems.

Hannah and Wilkinson 16 — Erin Hannah, Associate Professor of Political Science at King’s University College at Western University, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and Rorden Wilkinson, Professor and Chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Brooks World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Auckland (New Zealand), 2016 (“Zombies and IR: A Critical Reading,” *Politics*, Volume 36, Issue 1, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Sage Journals Online, p. 14)

Thinking beyond metaphors

Finally, questions need to be asked, and answers provided, about the value of including popular cultural metaphors in our pedagogical toolkits more generally. Metaphors may well be useful intellectual constructs for helping students imagine complex and abstract concepts (Marks, 2011) but, as Grayson et al. (2009, pp. 156–157) suggest, ‘we need to investigate the political possibilities and limits of politics that are produced and/or shaped by popular culture. This requires extending beyond identifying allegories and metaphors that take world politics and popular culture as static structural givens.’ In other words, we need to adapt Zombie IR to learning in ways that encourage students to think about the constitutive relationship between popular culture and IR. Students should be reflecting critically on how the zombie genre and participation in zombie scenarios shapes and makes political possibilities and limits. We must also beware of overextending popular cultural metaphors. If we use too many in our classrooms, we risk not providing students with sufficient opportunity to learn about the very real but under-discussed threats that are confronting us and that require immediate attention: enduring poverty, growing inequality, infectious disease, climate change and so on. In our rush to excite students, we need to make sure we do not restrict our capacity to lead them into real world terrain that needs our urgent attention.

#### The alternative to Drezner’s Zombie IR is Critical Zombie IR.

Hannah and Wilkinson 16 — Erin Hannah, Associate Professor of Political Science at King’s University College at Western University, holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Toronto, and Rorden Wilkinson, Professor and Chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Sussex, Honorary Professorial Fellow at the Brooks World Poverty Institute at the University of Manchester, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Auckland (New Zealand), 2016 (“Zombies and IR: A Critical Reading,” *Politics*, Volume 36, Issue 1, February, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Sage Journals Online, p. 14-16)

A way forward

For all of our worries, an IR of the undead can enable us to think about better, more progressive world orders, mindful of the need to guard against problematic social constructions [end page 14] of gender and race among others. We must resist using it as a vessel for simply and uncritically pouring old wine into new bottles. It should engage student imaginations not only because it helps us explain how we currently view the world, but also how we can think differently conceptually, theoretically, socially and world order-wise. Our purpose in this section is to offer some preliminary thoughts on how we might deploy zombies in IR classrooms more critically and productively. Our aim is not to provide a definitive guide, but rather to offer some points for discussion precisely because we see the potential of a Zombie IR to inspire students in progressive and world order changing ways.

Rather than asking students to apply IR theory to combat threats during a zombie apocalypse, one pathway to realising the potential of an IR of the undead is to construct scenarios wherein students are asked to build alternative world orders in a post-apocalypse society. We ought to think through with our students how humans should react and rebuild their societies, institutions and structures of governance in the wake of a zombie apocalypse in order to realise a better world. In this way we can move beyond simply illustrating existing theories and practices of international politics to generating new ideas, visions, theories and possibilities. Asking students to imagine alternative world orders has obvious appeal and involves an important dialectic exercise. On the one hand, it asks what world do we want to inhabit and how can we construct a place in which we would willingly live. On the other hand, it involves an implicit social critique, ethical argument and rejection of oppressive elements of prevailing world order and begs us to ask what are the obstacles to social, economic and political change and how can they be overcome. In this respect, Zombie IR can be an analytic, as well as an emancipatory, project.

We can, for instance, draw insight from feminist literature for thinking through the problematic social constructions of identity present in contemporary Zombie IR (Crawford, 2003). Feminists have long been engaged in imagining how we might better organise local and global governance in ways that are egalitarian and emancipatory and which explicitly deconstruct gendered power relations (see, e.g. Gearhart, 1979; Gilman, 1915; Lessing, 1980; Piercy, 1976). Perhaps most illuminating for our purposes are those that treat gender as unstable and mutable. For example, Ursula Le Guin’s (1969) The Left Hand of Darkness invites us to consider the consequences of sexless androgyny or ‘ambisexuality’. In this world, inhabitants have sexual urges only once a month during a ‘kemmer’ period and ‘do not know whether they will be the male or the female, and have no choice in the matter’ (Le Guin, 1969, p. 91). Instead, male and female physiology is randomly assigned depending on the chemistry between partners. One may be a childbearing mother to some and father to others, thereby collapsing notions of ‘otherness’ and revealing gender as a social construction. Society is thus better able to share burden and privilege equally among people. Similarly, in a world inhabited by zombies, ‘otherness’ is always dynamic and unstable. One can never be certain whether they or their families will become infected. Indeed, in some contemporary depictions (such as the Walking Dead) all humans carry the zombie pathogen and – except in the case of head trauma – will automatically re-animate as a zombie after death. In designing a postapocalypse world order students should be mindful of the instability of one’s identity and role in society and encouraged to confront the question ‘what if the “other” is me?’.

Herein lies the real value of Zombie IR. We can construct zombie scenarios in our classrooms that put students in situations akin to Rawls’ (1971) original position. Without knowing how the burdens and privileges of social order will ultimately fall, students are encouraged to approach the post-apocalypse world with compassion, empathy, humility and hope for all. [end page 15]

Yet, ultimately the potential of Zombie IR rests with an imaginative reconstruction of world order and global institutions that prioritise goals such as peace, egalitarianism and social justice in the wake of a zombie apocalypse. Engaging students in conversations and exercises about making the world a better place plants the seeds of change. It changes our discourse and expands the range of possibilities before us, pushing beyond the boundaries of prevailing wisdom. If treated in this way, Zombie IR has the potential to empower students to engage in meaningful global social transformation.

The use of an IR of the undead for thinking about the problems of world order requires one final elaboration. As we note above, H.G. Wells wrote The Shape of Things to Come as a prophetic warning about where the world was going. For Wells, the inevitable consequence of the imagined catastrophes of which he foretells – which for him were even more devastating than the chemical warfare of the First World War – was the establishment of a world state. It matters not that Wells advocated a world state; this is not our argument. What matters is that he used a pseudo-zombie apocalypse in tandem with other dystopias as a platform for thinking about how the world could look. The way we use the zombie story in IR could and should be used to say something profound about the world we do and ought to live in. Getting students to engage in this kind of thinking at an early stage rather than encouraging habits that repeat static behaviours – as Model United Nations and other such simulations do – is precisely what we should be aiming for in our classroom engagements. If we are to teach our students anything, then surely we must not only teach them to think in known theoretical forms, but also to move beyond those forms and to think about alternative possibilities. Yet we have been doing precisely what the very zombies we are using are doing: walking without thinking in the hope that we might fall upon a chance encounter. IR needs to change and wake up to the real possibilities of a zombie horde.

### Critique of Drezner #2

#### Drezner’s Zombie IR conceals IR theory’s history of colonial racism.

Yadav 11 — Vikash Yadav, Associate Professor of Political Science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, 2011 (“Apocalyptic Thinking in IR,” *Duck of Minerva*—a scholarly IR blog, February 19th, Available Online at <http://duckofminerva.com/2011/02/apocalyptic-thinking-in-ir.html>, Accessed 07-27-2016)

I do not see the discussions about zombies as a type of new or out-of-the-box thinking. If anything, the discussions of zombies that I have noted so far are completely “in-the-box” thinking, except with a touch of geeky humor, parody, and wit that is usually lacking in the discipline. In fact, the discourse seems to consist mainly of exercises in applying existing theoretical tools to an impossible scenario for pedagogical purposes or to lampoon the generally stale pedagogy of IR theory. From my perspective, the question is not how well or fairly does this exercise treat particular theoretical paradigms, but why this apocalyptic theoretical exercise presents itself at all.

Apocalyptic thinking has been a feature of IR theorizing for over a hundred years. In fact, I would contend that the zombie fad is at least the fourth wave of apocalyptic thinking. The four waves are:

1. Theories of Race War

2. Theories of Nuclear War and Deterrence

3. Clash of Civilizations

4. Zombie Apocalypse

The origins of IR as a discipline, is not in Ancient Greece or Renaissance Italy, but in the US at the dawn of the 20th century. Although the discipline has effectively purged its collective memory, the origins of the discipline were in concerns about race theory, race war, and colonial administration or “racial uplift” theories. In some cases, these origins have been obscured through rebranding, as when the Journal of Race Development adopted its new name, Foreign Affairs. As Robert Vitalis (2002) has carefully documented, the first generation of American IR theorists expressed alarm over emerging challenges to the principle of White Supremacy. Concerns about “The War of the Color Line” became intense, particularly after the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905. These concerns, coupled with racialism and outright racism, led to fearful imaginings of yellow, black, and brown hordes invading and overwhelming the white nations (only Europeans were considered to be divided into nations in these early formulations; the rest of the world was grouped by race).

The second wave of apocalyptic thinking begins with the end of World War II and the use/accumulation of nuclear weapons. This line of thinking became obsessed with pragmatic theories of deterrence, compellance, etc. While American society added ideological panics to racial panics, the discipline of IR generally moved toward a more sober posture. Although the obsession with horizontal nuclear proliferation remained tinged with racism/paternalism, particularly given the manifest contradiction with neo-Realist theories of deterrence, the overall paradigm was pragmatic and technical. Nevertheless, the field shifted a great deal of attention and resources toward issues of security between superpowers.

[One might add another apocalyptic wave related to over population (e.g. environmental collapse), but these neo-Malthusian concerns have actually been remarkably consistent throughout the 19th and 20th centuries up to the present.]

In the third wave, Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” thesis represented a remarkable (if unconscious) return to and re-statement of the prior alarmist concern with race war, now neatly repackaged as a meta-theory of civilizational war. That such a crude and unsophisticated world view ever made it to publication is astounding and an abiding stain on the discipline. It is not surprising that this theory was thoroughly discredited to the point of ridicule within and outside of the discipline. The real question is why a previously reputable scholar would have formulated such a completely flimsy argument.

The fourth wave then is the hypothetical obsession with zombies. There is an interesting moment in the blogging heads video below where Dan Drezner discusses an encounter where a commentator asks him point-blank whether the zombies are just a crude metaphor for Muslims. Drezner appears to be genuinely shocked by this reductive reading, which speaks to how effectively IR has purged its own disciplinary history and genealogy. This is not to argue in any way that Drezner was re-articulating a covert racial theory. Rather it is to argue that apocalyptic thinking in the discipline follows familiar modes of articulation that are easily conflated, and that the zombie discourse facilitates this conflation.

What interests me is not a search for hidden racial themes is discussions of zombies, but rather to inquire into the function of apocalyptic scenarios in the discipline. I would hypothesize that apocalyptic thinking functions to reassert the relevance of dominant modes of theorizing; apocalyptic thinking disciplines the discipline. Apocalyptic thinking is deeply conservative; it reasserts the relevance of theories which protect the status quo. These waves become particularly prominent at those points in which the discipline and Western society is being challenged by intellectual movements to broaden the areas of theoretical inquiry, and/or by social movements to overturn privilege. So it is not surprising to me that feminist and critical theories are given short shrift in the zombie discourse.

But what harm can it do to talk playfully about zombies? Isn’t it just a delicious send up of the discipline? Isn’t this a great way to get students and non-academics interested in International Relations?

At the end of blogging heads video, Drezner talks about how soldiers stationed in a forward operating base in Afghanistan sent him a photo of their unit reading his book. More than anything else, this makes evident the danger of such theorizing. IR as a discipline already deals in high levels of abstraction above the lives of ordinary people. More than any other discipline, IR is concerned with rationalizing or tempering an often de-humanizing raison d’etat and realpolitik. Is it wise, in that case, to promote a discourse which conceptualizes the enemy as zombies? Is this kind of alienation not precisely what should be countered and resisted through academic dialog and debate? Instead of imagining a zombie horde, would it not be better for our soldiers to try to understand the history and culture of the people whose land and lives they are occupying?

Of course, to offer a relevant alternative to soldiers on the front line would involve real out-of-the-box thinking — one that speaks to the culture and organizational structure of militants and civilians in Afghanistan. A discipline that is really relevant would need to build theories inductively rather than seeking to dig through a set of established abstract theories to see what can be forced to fit the situation at hand.

#### Mainstream IR theories rely on racist assumptions that poison scholarship.

Henderson 13 — Errol A. Henderson, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University- University Park, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, 2013 (“Hidden in plain sight: racism in international relations theory,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 26, Number 1, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Academic Search Complete, p. 90)

Conclusion

In this article, I’ve attempted to address the centrality of racism in IR theory. I examined the extent to which realism, liberalism and constructivism are oriented by racist precepts grounded in the intellectual foundation of IR. Specifically, a racist dualism inheres within the assumptions informing the foundational construct of IR: namely, anarchy; and due to the centrality of this construct within prominent theses that draw on it, racist precepts have an enduring impact on IR theory today. In sum, a racist latticework undergirds major theoretical frameworks that inform research and policy in IR. Theses that rest on racist claims are not simply odious; they are untethered to the reality (world politics itself) that they purport to explain. Vitalis (2000) is correct that there is a ‘norm against noticing’ white supremacism in mainstream IR discourse. The failure to address it leaves IR analysts ill equipped to address accurately the intellectual history of IR, the theoretical development of the field and the prospects for theory-building in IR that will generate meaningful research and policy for the vast majority of the world’s people.

#### Mainstream IR theory is irredeemably racist — it is founded on a conception of “anarchy” defined by a racial contract that maintains white supremacy.

Henderson 13 — Errol A. Henderson, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University- University Park, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, 2013 (“Hidden in plain sight: racism in international relations theory,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 26, Number 1, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Academic Search Complete, p. 88-89)

Summary

Thus, it is not difficult to trace the historical and contemporary role and impact of racism in IR theory. Racism has not only informed the paradigms of world politics; it was fundamental to the conceptualization of its key theoretical touchstone: anarchy. The social contract theorists rooted their conceptualizations of the state of nature in a broader ‘racial contract’ that dichotomized humanity racially and established a white supremacist hierarchy in their foundational conceptions of society. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century IR theorists built on this racist dualism as they constructed their conception of a global anarchy and the role of ‘civilized’ whites in providing, maintaining and ensuring order within it by means of a system of international power relations among whites—or, at minimum, dominated by whites; and a system of colonial subjugation for nonwhites—or those nonwhites who failed to successfully resist their domination militarily. The impact and role of racism are manifest through the major paradigms operative today—realism, neorealism, liberalism/idealism and constructivism, mainly through their continued reliance on a racist conception of anarchy; and in the case of neorealism through its grounding in African primitivism, and in the case of Marxism in its reliance on and normalizing of a Eurocentric teleology of economic development for the world.

To be sure, the dualism at the broad theoretical level of paradigms underscores, guides and informs the more specific dichotomies at the level of theories, models and theses that are derived from these paradigms—and especially those that are applied to Africa’s political processes—and to other regions as well. In the case of [end page 88] African international relations, they both contextualize and rationalize a black African primitivism juxtaposed to a white Western progressivism, a black African peculiar savagery and a white Western universalist humanity, resulting in an enduring African tribal/ethnic warfare frame of reference contrasted to an evolved Western democratic peace; in each case a static ossified ahistorical permanence contrasted to a dynamic evolving transcendence. One result is that one must endure what are considered to be ‘meaningful’ or ‘appropriate’ or even ‘incisive’ or ‘cutting-edge’ discussions of Africa’s domestic and international politics that have as their point of departure loose and often obtuse references to ‘hearts of darkness’, ‘greed versus grievance’, ‘tribal warfare’, ‘warlordism’, ‘frontiersmen’ and a litany of other metaphors that would not pass the editor’s desk at most top-tier academic journals as legitimate lenses through which to observe and examine contemporary armed conflicts in the Western world. Notably, rarely do those same journals publish work on the historical and enduring racism embedded in the major paradigms of world politics, or discuss the implications of such a condition if it is shown to obtain.

#### Our critique of IR’s inherent racism is vital to break the silence — colorblind IR perpetuates a fiction that promotes white supremacy.

Henderson 13 — Errol A. Henderson, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University- University Park, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, 2013 (“Hidden in plain sight: racism in international relations theory,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 26, Number 1, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Academic Search Complete, p. 89)

In fact, the ‘norm against noticing’ white racism is so intense that it engenders a ‘silencing’ of those who would raise it; or it ensures against publication in mainstream outlets for such work except that authors provide appropriate euphemisms for the atrocities associated with white racism—especially against blacks—or they provide the requisite ‘balance’ to emphasize the role of nonwhites in their own subjugation—as if white supremacism and the imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism and internal colonialism that it has employed against Africans, Asians, and Native Americans are somehow the responsibility of groups other than the whites who created, maintained and continue to profit from them. Thus, the racist dualism in world politics creates, in turn, a dual quandary for IR scholars and many Africanists seeking to publish in Western journals—and many non-Western ones, too—wherein white racist expectations of the appropriateness of certain lines of inquiry often limit the discourse of African politics to hollow phraseology and meaningless metaphors, while they simultaneously check informed challenges to historical and contemporary expressions, practices and institutions of white racism in academia by ensuring that such racism is rarely confronted in the major publications in IR/world politics in clear and direct terms.

Another result is that the norm against noticing white racism leaves IR scholars teaching a history of the development of IR which ignores the salience of colonialism as central to the origins of the field. That is, in continuing to teach the fiction that the field emerged following the devastation of World War I as ‘idealists’ led by Wilson and others such as Lowes Dickinson, Zimmern, Giddings and Kerr sought to provide the institutional checks on the realpolitik that was implicated in the ‘war to end all wars’, we belie the reality of the centrality of colonialism, race development and white racial supremacy to the development of the academic field of IR. Thus, our narrative creates an academic fiction that hovers outside of its own history. The presence of this narrative is a testament to the white supremacism that is a centrepiece of the field given its role in ensuring a ‘norm against noticing’ the centrality of white racism in world politics. It simultaneously silences or marginalizes perspectives that focus on the importance of white racism in the development of the field of IR/world politics, and similarly, those who would raise this as a legitimate research focus for the most sensible of reasons: it happens to be true.

#### The foundational precept of IR theory—*anarchy*—is fundamentally racist.

Henderson 13 — Errol A. Henderson, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University- University Park, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, 2013 (“Hidden in plain sight: racism in international relations theory,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 26, Number 1, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Academic Search Complete, p. 71-72)

Introduction

This article addresses the centrality of racism in international relations (IR) theory; specifically, in realism and liberalism, two of the most prominent paradigms of IR. It examines the extent to which these major paradigms of world politics are oriented by racist—primarily, white supremacist—precepts that inhere within their foundational construct, namely, anarchy. I maintain that due to the centrality of anarchy—and other racially infused constructs—within these prominent paradigms, white supremacist precepts are not only nominally associated with the origins of the field, but have an enduring impact on IR theory and influence contemporary theses ranging from neorealist conceptions of the global system to liberal democratic peace claims, and constructivist theses as well. The article proceeds in several sections. First, I briefly review the centrality of white supremacism in the origins of IR as an academic field of study. Second, I discuss the role of white supremacism in the foundational constructs of IR theory; namely, the social contract theses that inform IR scholars’ conception of anarchy, which is the starting point for most paradigms of world politics. I maintain that social contract theses that are often cast as ‘race-neutral’ actually suggest one type of relations for white people and their institutions and states, and another for nonwhite people and their institutions and states. This discourse provided the point of departure for subsequent IR theorizing among realists, liberals and constructivists on the relations among states in the global system. Therefore, third, I discuss how realism, liberalism and constructivism derive their notions of anarchy from social contract theses that are based in a racist dualism that dichotomizes humanity and the relations of states composed of different [end page 71] peoples. Before turning to this broader discussion, let’s consider the manner in which racism influences IR, in general.

#### Anarchy is IR’s Rosetta Stone — if *it’s* racist, so is IR theory.

Henderson 13 — Errol A. Henderson, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University- University Park, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, 2013 (“Hidden in plain sight: racism in international relations theory,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 26, Number 1, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Academic Search Complete, p. 79-80)

The racial contract as the basis of the social contract

International relations theory takes as its point of departure the state of nature and the social contract, given that these constructs reflect and inform IR scholars’ conceptions of anarchy, which is widely perceived as the key variable that differentiates international politics from domestic politics. Anarchy is ‘the Rosetta Stone of International Relations’ (Lipson 1984, 22) and provides the conceptual linchpin upon which the major paradigms of IR rest. Our conceptualization of anarchy in IR theory derives from the insights of social contract theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant, whose characterization of the state of nature, which is the hypothetical condition characterized by human interaction prior to the establishment of society, was adopted by IR theorists to conceptualize the global system. But Charles Mills (1997) insists that the social contract that is the focus of each of these theorists is embedded in a broader ‘racial contract’. Unlike [end page 79] the social contract, which presumably proposes a singular homogeneous humanity from which civil society will emerge, the racial contract established a heterogeneous humanity hierarchically arranged and reflecting a fundamental dualism demarcated by race. This racial dualism inherent in social contract theses was passed on to the IR theory that drew from them; and it persists today in the paradigms that rest on their assumptions.

#### Our argument isn’t that IR theorists are *personally* racist, but that IR theory as a *field of study* is structurally racist.

Henderson 13 — Errol A. Henderson, Associate Professor of Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University- University Park, holds a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, 2013 (“Hidden in plain sight: racism in international relations theory,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Volume 26, Number 1, Available Online to Subscribing Institutions via Academic Search Complete, p. 78-79)

While studies utilizing each of these approaches have contributed to our understanding of the role of racism in world politics, they have largely ignored the issue of primary concern to us here: how racism informs the major paradigms of IR theory such as realism and liberalism.4 Racism informs IR theory mainly through its influence on the empirical, ethical and epistemological assumptions that undergird its paradigms. These assumptions operate individually and in combination. For example, racist empirical assumptions bifurcate humanity on the basis of race and determine our view of what/whom we study and how we study it/them—privileging the experiences of ‘superior’ peoples and their societies and institutions. These assumptions also lead us to privilege ethical orientations of the ‘superior’ peoples which justify their privileged status. In such a context, epistemological assumptions that reflect and reinforce the racist dualism are more likely to become ascendant, and ‘knowledge’ that supports the racist dichotomy—both the privileged position of the racial hegemon and the [end page 78] underprivileged position of the racial subaltern—is more likely to be viewed as valid. Such knowledge drawn from the empirical domain becomes legitimized through ethical justifications that ‘naturalize’ the racial hierarchy. In this way, the separate dimensions often reinforce each other.

Whether or not the empirical, ethical and epistemological assumptions operate singly or in combination, it is important to demonstrate the role of these assumptions in IR theory today, especially given that mainstream IR also provides prominent critiques of racism. Ignoring these critiques would misrepresent the degree of racism in the field and disregard the challenge to racist discourse within IR from IR theorists themselves. For example, few IR scholars openly embrace a racist ontology that assumes for whites a higher order of being than for nonwhites.5 Moreover, racist ethical assumptions usually receive the opprobrium they deserve in present IR discourse. Racist epistemological assumptions are largely challenged by the prevalence in IR theory of the view that our ‘knowledge’ of world politics usually requires us to have something approximating evidence to determine the accuracy of rival truth claims. Finally, racist empirical assumptions are checked by the dominant view in IR that our theses should be broadly applicable across states and societies and should be substantiated by cross-national and cross-temporal tests. But the sanguine view of the propensity of IR literature to check racist assumptions, or to generate non-racist theoretical discourse for the field, begs a fuller exploration of how ethical, epistemological and empirical assumptions underlie prominent theses in IR. The main sources of these racist assumptions that inform our present IR discourse are the primary theoretical constructs of most IR theory: the state of nature, the social contract and the conception of anarchy that derives from them.